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ABSTRACT

College students' level of interest in volunteering for eight campus organizations was compared with their foremost educational objective (career orientation versus personal development orientation). A random sample of 858 entering students at a large eastern public university was administered the University New Student Census, which included a question about educational objectives, and the Campus Involvement Interest Survey, a survey of interest in volunteer opportunities by level of compensation. Results showed that career-oriented students (a majority of the students) were generally less interested in volunteer opportunities than their personal development-oriented counterparts. Students undecided concerning career goals appeared to be the least interested in volunteering. The paper discusses the apparent disregard of opportunities for career exploration by some students and interventions to increase interest in volunteering. Includes 12 references. (JDD)

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DIFFERENCES IN VOLUNTEER INTEREST BY LEVEL OF CAREER ORIENTATION

Janice H. Altman and William E. Sedlacek

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Summary

College students' level of interest in volunteering for eight campus organizations was compared with their foremost educational objective (career orientation vs. personal development orientation). A random sample of 858 entering students was administered the University New Student Census (UNSC), which included a question about educational objectives, and the Campus Involvement Interest Survey (CIIS), a survey of interest in volunteer opportunities by level of compensation. Data were analyzed using a three-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA).

Results showed that career-oriented students (a majority of the students) were generally less interested in volunteer opportunities than their personal development-oriented counterparts. Undecided students (those whose foremost educational objective was "to decide upon a career goal") appeared to be the least interested in volunteering overall.

Reasons for the apparent disregard of opportunities for career exploration by career-oriented students, and undecided students in particular, are explored. Interventions including outreach to undecided students, new marketing strategies of volunteer opportunities, consumer education for students and employers (of the benefits of volunteer work), and the inclusion of career exploration activities in the curriculum are considered. Alternative strategies, such as interventions aimed at recent graduates, and implications for changes in the needs of increasingly career-oriented students and the direction of employment counseling services are also discussed.

An opportune time to explore vocational alternatives and acquire skills is during one's training, before entering a profession. However, a person rarely retains much information before they are ready to do so. College offers many unique opportunities for students to make choices, test alternatives, and build skills, at a time when they are deciding upon and preparing for a career. Employment counseling interventions at this crucial time may facilitate and enhance students' career exploration and prevent some future job dissatisfaction. Effective interventions may also suggest principles which are transferrable to those engaged in career exploration at other transition times.

College students are beginning to recognize the importance of career exploration during their educational training. Studies show that career concerns are of more importance to college students today than 15 years ago (Weissberg, et al. 1982; Mason-Sowell & Sedlacek, 1984; Carney, Savitz, & Weiskott, 1979). Mason-Sowell and Sedlacek (1984) found that more college students were in school primarily to prepare for a career.

A 1982 needs assessment survey (Weissberg, et al.) found that "the career development needs of students were considerably stronger than either the personal or academic needs...and that the highest needs centered on obtaining work experience, exploring job opportunities, developing job-seeking skills, and preparing for careers" (p. 119). Another study of perceived needs of entering students also identified the need for career

information as the greatest (Walters & Saddlemire, 1979). Students who were undecided on a major generally rated career information needs significantly higher than those who declared a major, so this phenomenon of increased career-orientation is not restricted to those who have already decided on a career and are simply seeking job skills and experience.

A recent study (Martinez, Sedlacek, & Bachhuber, 1985), which investigated the career status and satisfaction of college graduates, suggested that earlier career counseling interventions would be helpful for arts and humanities students who "were significantly more likely (than business students) to be in the stage of exploring possible careers" (p. 55). In addition, about half of the alumni sampled "regretted not seeking more help with job search skills" (p. 55). In a review of research on student participation in field experience, one of the benefits most consistently cited by both students and their parents was in the area of career awareness. Students most frequently listed the following related "awarenesses" as a result of their participation in field education: career skills actually needed, education required, competition in this career, rewards in this career, widened knowledge of career possibilities, and help in choosing a career (Williams, 1990).

The potential vocational benefits of volunteering range from career exploration opportunities to the chance to accrue some on-the-job experience. Participation in organized student activities, which contributes to the total development of the

student (Miller and Jones, 1981), aids in the formulation of realistic vocational plans. Williams and Winston (1985) found that students who participated in organized student activities had significantly greater developmental task achievement in their career plans than those who did not participate in any organized student activities.

Despite the prevalence of volunteer activities, both on and off-campus, little empirical research has been done about either the motivations or the outcomes of volunteer involvement. In addition, little is known about which incentives are most effective in generating volunteer involvement and whether or not this varies by the type of volunteer activity.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to determine if early career orientation was related to interest in volunteer work. Specifically, the relationship between degree of career orientation (whether or not career issues are students' main objective in college) and interest in volunteering in different campus organizations for various incentives was investigated. Since those who take advantage of organized student activities are assisted in making appropriate career plans (Williams & Winston, 1985) and in building skills for their resumes, it was hypothesized that students with career-related objectives would show greater interest in volunteering for various student organizations.

METHOD

Participants were a random sample of 858 entering students (48% female and 52% male) at a large eastern public university. At the summer orientation (which is attended by 90% of entering students each year), participants were administered a questionnaire on background, attitudes and expectations and one of three randomly-assigned forms of the "Campus Involvement Interest Survey" (Balenger & Sedlacek, 1990). Based on students' responses to an item from the questionnaire about their "most important educational objective", students were categorized as: (1) career-oriented (either "decided" students who wanted "to learn skills directly applicable to career goals" or "undecided" students who wanted "to decide upon a career goal"), and (2) personal development-oriented (either students who wanted "to become more independent in thinking and behavior" or students who indicated some "other" personal goals).

The Campus Involvement Interest Survey asked participants to rate their level of interest (on a five-point Likert scale from very disinterested to very interested) in each of eight campus volunteer opportunities. The three randomly-assigned forms were identical except that they referred to three different levels of compensation for volunteering: (1) "serving as a volunteer", (2) "earning academic credit as a volunteer", and (3) "earning a monetary award as a volunteer". Group means for each form served as a basis of comparison of volunteer interest for different types of compensation.

Analysis

Data were analyzed using a three-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), with form, gender and educational objective (career orientation vs. personal development orientation) as independent variables and the eight campus volunteer opportunities as dependent variables. Use of the term significance throughout this report will indicate statistical significance at the .05 level.

RESULTS

The data generally confirmed the recent trends of increased vocationalism among entering college students: 58% of entering students wanted to learn career skills. An additional 21% were undecided on a career goal, but their primary educational objective was to decide.

Volunteer Interest by Type of Work

Overall level of interest in volunteering, regardless of form (type of compensation), was highest for the homecoming committee, the campus recruitment organization, and the co-ed service fraternity (see Table 1). Participants showed the least interest in volunteering for the health center and the counseling center.

Compensation and Volunteer Interest

There were no significant differences in volunteer interest among the types of compensation which were presented on the three different forms. In other words, participants who were offered some monetary compensation or academic credit did <u>not</u> show more

interest in volunteering than participants who were not offered incentives.

Career Orientation and Volunteer Interest

The MANOVA was significant for gender and educational objective, although there were no significant interactions. Females were significantly more interested than males in six of the eight volunteer opportunities; all but the athletic department and the co-ed service fraternity. There were significant differences (shown in bold in Table 1) among students with different educational objectives (i.e., career vs. personal development) in five of the eight volunteer opportunities. In each case, career-oriented students were <u>less</u> interested in volunteer work than personal development-oriented students (see Table 1).

Insert Table 1 about here

Overall, the undecided group was the <u>least</u> interested of all in volunteering in six of the eight organizations, although the difference was significant in only two organizations. In one case, the undecided group alone had significantly less interest than each of the other response groups.

DISCUSSION

Overall, these results show differences in volunteer interest by type of work and educational objective but not by type of compensation. Compensation can be considered an externally-offered incentive to increase interest in volunteer work. There

are also internal rewards and motivations which may be related to volunteer interest. Although the nature of these internal incentives may differ among individuals, it seems reasonable that career-related incentives would appeal to career-oriented students, but that is not the case.

Career-oriented students, as a group, were less interested in volunteer work across every organization studied, regardless of the kind of work involved. This pattern was especially evident among those who were undecided on a career. This lack of interest in what seems to be an opportunity for career exploration could be explained if these students simply were not interested in or ready for career exploration. However, that seems unlikely since "undecided" students identified the objective "to decide upon a career goal" as their first and foremost educational objective. It is intriguing to consider if there are other factors related to both academic and career success which differentiate "undecided" students from students in general. Other studies could explore factors which may predispose students to being "undecided" and how that relates to the setting and attainment of educational and career objectives.

Findings from a study on different personality traits of vocationally undecided students (Lucas & Epperson, 1988) showed that five different types of undecided students exist. Perhaps examination of the "undecided" students in this study would reveal certain qualities (such as low self-esteem, high anxiety, and little interest in work-related activities) which distinguish

them from other undecided types and would explain their lack of interest in volunteer opportunities. Differences in the type of undecided student would also suggest different treatment strategies.

Another explanation for career-oriented students being less interested in volunteer opportunities is that they are simply too busy with academic pursuits or outside part-time employment to be involved in volunteer organizations or extracurricular activities. However, other data collected indicated that the career-oriented students (especially the "undecideds") were the least likely to have any work plans at all. It is possible that none of the eight volunteer opportunities described in this study appealed to the particular career interests of these career-oriented students. Further study would need to be done across campuses with different volunteer opportunities to determine if this was a factor.

The most likely explanation for less volunteer interest among career-oriented students is their perception of volunteer work. They may not view volunteer work as an opportunity to explore careers, learn new skills, establish contacts, or enhance their resumes. In fact, they may even perceive work in student organizations as a distraction rather than an advantage in the pursuit of their career goals. A similar conclusion was drawn by Sedlacek, Walters and Valente (1985) in their study of counseling center use by students of different orientations. Despite increased availability and advertising of vocational services for

the documented increase in vocationally-oriented students, they found that actual users of counseling center services were less likely to be vocational. In addition, vocational types were not even more likely to seek vocational counseling services than other students. In both studies, vocationally-oriented students did not have the anticipated interest in either vocational counseling services or in volunteer opportunities to advance their employment goals. These results seem to confirm the findings of Fitch (1987) in his study of motivations for volunteer service. Egoistic reasons for involvement were rated highest, but the benefit of "career exploration" was rated unexpectedly low. Fitch concluded that "exploring careers was not important to them in volunteering" (p. 429). Despite the documented benefits of volunteer experience, career-oriented students apparently do not perceive volunteer work as assisting them in advancing their career goals.

IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELORS

What are the career preparation needs of the expanding population of vocationally-oriented students, and how can these needs be met? Can perceptions of the value of volunteer experience be changed? Some improved marketing of volunteer opportunities, including education of the benefits of such experience to career exploration, may be effective. In addition, some special outreach efforts which specifically target the needs of undecided students would be indicated. Perhaps if a study was done which determined the importance of volunteer experience to employers,

it would demonstrate the value of volunteering to students. Maybe other methods of providing field experience as a means of career exploration need to be developed. It may be important for colleges and universities to include more direct career preparation activities in the curriculum and student program requirements in order to insure some early exploration. Organizations who depend upon volunteer service may find increasing difficulty in finding volunteers if they do not appeal to the needs and goals of the increasing number of career-oriented students. However, the dilemma remains: Should counseling professionals expend energy in marketing career preparation services and/or opportunities in an effort to reach disinterested students?

An alternative is found in one study (Martinez, Sedlacek, & Bachhuber, 1985) which suggested that career-planning services should target recent alumni rather than young college students who are not interested in the services. Even though it is logical to start career exploration at an earlier stage, it may not be realistic to provide service where there is no perceived need. Therefore, interventions directed at individuals who are ready for career preparation services (at graduation time) may be much more beneficial. Employment counselors might also educate the entering workforce and raise awareness of both employers and potential employees by directing some attention toward the volunteer activities of individuals who have participated, and by providing some validation for their work. Important skills and

career information may be overlooked if job-seekers fail to perceive the value of their volunteer experience.

Changes in the orientation, objectives, and experience of graduates entering the workforce could have far-reaching implications for the direction of employment counseling services. These vocationally-oriented alumni are not as likely to have received vocational (or any) counseling services during college, which may affect both their career adjustment as well as their attitude toward seeking employment counseling services at a later time. They are also less likely to have explored various careers through volunteer activities (due to lack of interest) and may be less informed about the rewards and demands of a career and about career possibilities in general. Different types of interventions may be required to meet the changing needs of those now entering the workforce.

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Table 1
Mean* Interest in Volunteer Opportunities by Educational Objective

VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATION**	EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVE: Career-Oriented — Undecided	Career-Oriented — Decided	Personal Development-Oriented — Independent	Personal Development-Oriented — Other
Homecoming	3.11 1.17	3.10 1.15	3.28 1.17	2.91 1.32
Campus Recruitment Organ.	**2.93** 1.19	**3.09** 1.15	**3.45** 1.07	**3.04** 1.17
Service fraternity	2.96 1.06	3.04 1.07	3.30 1.13	3.06 1.15
HELP Center	**2.78** 1.18	**2.95** 1.24	**3.33** 1.17	**3.19** 1.24
Programming Board	**2.71** 1.07	**2.91** 1.10	**3.18** 1.04	**3.17** 1.18
Athletic Dept.	2.98 1.26	2.87 1.18	2.90 1.29	2.67 1.17
Counseling Center	**2.61** 1.11	**2.80** 1.10	**3.22** 1.08	**2.97** 1.15
Health Center	**2.46** 1.17	**2.75** 1.16	**2.93** 1.18	**2.91** 1.20

* Note. Means were transformed to make more intuitive sense for reporting purposes. For example, higher values show greater volunteer interest (means range from 1 to 5). Standard deviations are shown under each mean.

** Note. Volunteer opportunities for which there were significant differences are shown in bold type.

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